



THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FACTOR TO SUCCESSFUL TEAM LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Team leadership is a very challenging process. Its dynamics must be appreciated especially in today's business environment where quality should be assured. To achieve and maintain a competitive edge in business, the adoption of varied leadership roles with particular reference to organisational tasks at hand is imperative. However, because of the diversity of circumstantial realities, leaders are challenged with appropriate role adoption.

Given the diversity of tasks within an organisation, successful leadership is to be

flexible enough to adopt suitable roles in the achievement of desired goals. This sensitivity in leadership has been termed "emotional intelligence".

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a leadership concept that has received a lot of attention in the 21st century. This concept has been defined by many authors to mean several things including common sense.

This paper reviews the essence of leadership dimensions of the concept. It also discusses the dynamics of team leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of leadership has several meanings, depending on when and by whom it is being used and interpreted, and as such is very difficult to define. This notwithstanding, Grint (2005) defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of other individuals in the achievement of a

common goal. Some writers have explained the term team leadership (a construct of leadership), as a collective influence of members within a team on one another. This suggests that team leadership has both vertical and lateral relationships (Sivasubramaniam et al 2002). In view of this fact, leaders need a deep sense of awareness to chart a successful course.

Leading teams is a challenging process, whose dynamics will be discussed in this article. Marquis and Huston (2009) suggested that leaders need to adopt a variety of roles to ensure goals are met. Some customary leadership roles have been documented as decision maker, forecaster, coach, counsellor, teacher, mentor, advocate and visionary, to mention but a few. It is interesting to note that while it may not be necessary for any one leader to assume all these roles at any given time, the choice of a role or a combination thereof is necessary for team organizational success. Leadership roles may differ within and across organisational cultures, as a result. The inappropriate use of judgement in the exercise of leadership authority has been noted to be the downfall of many a great leader (Adair 2002).

The adoption of any one leadership role is therefore dependent on the nature of the task at hand, which in turn has a strong influence on the leadership traits to be adopted. Equally as diverse as circumstances, are the challenges leaders face in adopting appropriate roles. Given the diversity of tasks within an organisation, it is imperative for successful leadership to be flexible enough to adopt suitable roles to achieve desired goals. This sensitivity in leadership has been termed "*emotional intelligence*". It is usual to find in most organisations that as much as leadership roles differ in accordance with the tasks at hand, it seems so confusing that employees who find the inconsistency resulting from sudden role changes in a leader become uncomfortable. As a result, they mistakenly view it as a cause for mistrust. Goleman (2000) proffered that: to be successful, leaders need to be emotionally intelligent. He defined emotional intelligence as the ability of a leader to be aware of both self and environment in

addition to being able to manage these variables very effectively. An emotionally intelligent leader is one that effectively communicates both vertically and laterally.

TEAM LEADERSHIP

A team may be said to be made up of two or more people who interact and share their activities, and work towards a particular goal achievement (Daft 2008). Team leadership is a very challenging role in today's business environment. It is a skill which must, of strict essence, be sufficiently acquired to realize meaningful developments (Thamhain 2004).

In their study, Sivasubramaniam et al (2002) defined team leadership as a collective influence of members within a team on each other. Successful team leadership is one that ensures team effectiveness, which yields benefits accruable not only to the organisation but to the individual workers as well. Evidence suggests that team leadership has the potential to either break or make teams (Day et al 2004).

An appreciation of task structures has been documented as essential for success in the work of teams (Sivasubramaniam et al 2002). A clear vision of the task at hand, including expectations and systems available, must be understood by each team member. This ensure the maximization of benefits and reduction of errors in order to achieve customer satisfaction.

Effective communication skills have been suggested by literature to be of prime importance, not only in conveying vision and expectations, but also in listening to concerns of team members. Fears, doubts and anxieties need to be taken into account, even if that is all the leader will do. A disregard of these could

develop into unhealthy work environments, eventually affecting productivity, quality and the possibility of growing into unhealthy work environments of mistrust and disappointment among staff. They could end up as drivers against desired change (Kotter 2007). Communication with specific reference to group capacity should be done rigorously through appropriate assignment of team membership.

The need to carefully assign team membership has been documented to reflect successful team performance (Weber 2002). One essential quality that is preferable in the selection of team members is experience. Even though experience is necessary to ensure success of the task at hand and minimise errors, the need for experienced workers may not necessarily be an issue if team cohesiveness is at play (Pettinger 2007). Members act as a check on one another where there is a good team spirit. Individual team members are rewarded for the adoption of team values and a group identity.

To foster team cohesiveness, careful reminders of team norms, and satisfaction of emotional needs of team members is imperative. It must be seriously considered to enhance a contingency approach and creation of "group-think" (Dirks. 2000). Where group members are of heterogeneous origin in particular, he recommended the need to spell out exact roles to ensure smooth discharge of duties. This is where an appreciation of the dynamics of teamwork acts as an important factor contributing to successful team leadership.

TEAMWORK AND DYNAMICS

The concept of teamwork dates as far back to biblical times. Literature suggests that there

are different types of teams. Some examples given include functional, cross-functional, self-managed, self-defining and virtual teams (Yukl 2003).

The benefits of teamwork have equally been documented in several studies, the most famous being the Hawthorne study of the 1920s, which provided a great deal of insight into the workings of groups and group behaviour (Thamhain 2004). In this study the workings of teams and team dynamics were demonstrated by motivation - a leadership concept that may be explained to mean what makes people do what they end up doing. In the Hawthorne experiments, the influence of the presence of supervisors in working environments was measured. Whenever workers perceived that they were being cared for or made center of focus, they pulled their weight and gave their best, which led to increase in productivity and vice-versa. It was concluded that workers actually needed to be motivated positively to assure productivity.

In related studies, Sivasubramaniam et al (2002) remarked that the benefits of teamwork include a clear central focus of group members who are willing to make sacrifices for the good of the team's mission and focus. They argued, however that, the ability of the team to deliver is heavily dependent on its leadership. Leadership styles that adopt transformational approaches have been noted to yield better results. In these situation, the followers of the leader are challenged by the sense of purpose and dedication of their leader. These attributes yield positive results, including motivation, efficiency, and performance.

Cross-functional teams are noted to be the best models for organisations. Weber (2002) explains that because they bring together

several individuals from different backgrounds to focus on an activity, there is synergy. This principle states that there is more to be gained from the whole (the team) than the sum of its individual parts. By the very nature of the functional diversity of team members, there are challenges with such cross-functional teams. Much as they have been noted to be unique in function, it is necessary to be wary of the divergent backgrounds of team members, which should be steered carefully towards the chief end of the objective at hand. Pearce (2004) suggests that adopting a strategy for creating interdependence and shared relationships within the team could well lead to higher productivity. Participatory leadership, he suggested, could be adopted for the creation of team cohesiveness.

Multiple representative responsibilities have been mentioned in the literature to be an issue of cross-functional teams that need careful management. By the very nature of their composition, members of these teams have other reporting relations with functional managers and, as a result, the likelihood of conflict is relatively high (Sivasubramaniam et al 2002). To successfully lead teams, an application of firm but fair leadership principles needs to be adopted, as opposed to passive leadership or the laissez-faire approach of leadership, which avoids tackling issues of poor performance or handling conflicts.

In his study, Weber (2002) explained how good team spirit impacts positively on performance. It has been documented to produce outputs of job satisfaction, control of absenteeism, and high levels of productivity. Cross-functional teams have so much to offer organisations that are under pressure to do so many things faster, cheaper and better.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a leadership concept that has received a lot of attention in the 21st century. This concept has been defined by many authors to mean several things including *leadership with a heart, common sense and gifted leadership*. In his definition, the proponents of this leadership concept explained emotional intelligence as gifted leadership in which heart, head, feeling, and thought meet (Goleman 2000). In explaining the dimensions of EI, Goleman concluded that awareness and management play a critical role.

Irrespective of the preferred leadership style, a leader should be emotionally intelligent in order to chart a desirable pathway. An emotionally intelligent leader, he explained, is one that is self-aware, is socially aware, can manage self, and can also manage relationships.

Organisations could benefit greatly from the adoption of emotional intelligence, which Ashkanasy and Daus (2001) suggest is very peculiar to transformational leadership styles. They argued that charismatic leadership has a strength in itself of being able to attract a lot of devotion in followers. However, transformational leadership does better at not gaining trust from followers. It is also better able to sustain commitment in followers, who perceive genuine commitment to the process in their leader, the epitome of exactly what is preached. An emotionally intelligent leader is one who preaches virtue and also practices it.

Where norms are made and rules are prescribed for team members, leaders should be the first to honour them. When, on the other hand, there is a need for concessions to be

made, the reason(s) for this should be made known to all team members. The leader who is emotionally intelligent could then be said to be trustworthy on the grounds of fairness, transparency, and compassion (Dirks, 2000).

Trust is a central phenomenon to the success of any team. In his study, Dirks (2000) indicated relationships between the issues of trust and team performance. He demonstrated that where there is a display of trust within any team, the actions and words of individual members are not misconstrued. There is sound evidence of trust even when one party seems at a disadvantage against the other. Trust, he concluded, leads to high levels of performance, as there usually is no cause for suspicion or misinterpretation.

Day et al (2004) supported this fact in their study, in which they prove that because the nature of teams are cyclical, mutual performance and monitoring is of essence to assure performance. This performance, they concluded, is on-going in teams that demonstrate trust in themselves. They are better able to adapt when there is a need to do so and are also flexible enough in re-adjusting to achieve goals in the face of deviations from set targets.

Team members have been documented to have the ability to influence one another as much as individual leaders are able to influence followers (Sivasubramaniam et al, 2002). This ability challenges leaders to adopt strategies that ensures that attention is paid more to lateral, instead of vertical, relationships which have a greater impact on performance (Pearce 2004). Emotionally intelligent leadership strives to maintain group cohesiveness through group processes, which are manifested in a collective model of behaviour.

In this model, there is usually a focus on the group rather than individual consensus.

The essence of EI, therefore, is to achieve an appreciable degree of emotionally intelligent resonance within teams. Just as dissonance portrays a lack of harmony, emotionally intelligent resonance can produce harmony manifested through cheerfulness, laughter, and joy (Goleman 2000).

In particularly volatile environments, the benefits of EI can help break the hold of transactional management – a leadership approach which focuses on mistakes and correction of staff rather than developing potential (Sivasubramaniam et al 2002). Careful management of teams is essential for quality assurance and target realisation. Where this is the expectation, leadership styles with the aim of resonance building are recommended against pacesetter or commanding styles (Goleman 2000).

CONCLUSION

It is now agreed that, much as team leadership seems to be a challenge, the adoption of transparent processes in the discharge of leadership authority yields a lot of benefits, including team support and trust. Team members, themselves co-leaders of the process, share leadership authority and thus help the process.

Although cross-functional teams may have unique characteristics in being able to deliver, this ability is heavily tied to trust which is seen in team cohesiveness and group think. To effectively lead teams, Beer and Eisenstat (2000) suggest that leadership drives must be influenced by strategy, which must include a careful analysis of the silent killers of

organisations, including laissez-faire management style, poor lateral communication, unclear vision and mission, and conflicting priorities. Even though there are other restraining factors that challenge team leadership, multiple representations, careful address of issues and especially the specific prescription to terms of reference need to be handled tactfully to realise goals.

Where leadership exercises referent power, its locus of control is considered to be externally located, thereby infringing on the independence of leadership drives Daft (2008) argued that, in a fast-paced world and in the light of unprecedented technological advancements, the need to embrace some change without the often constraining factors of bureaucracy is of essence, if leadership must be successful.

Irrespective of the cultural dimensions of leadership, the choice of roles needs to be done carefully to suit specific tasks. Much as cross-functional teams have been heralded within organisations to be the best in achieving targets, these teams cannot be productive without some form of appropriate leadership

interventions. Despite the capacity of any team, there would be no meaningful realization of goals should emotionally intelligent interventions be disregarded.

To attain and then maintain a competitive edge therefore, organisations must consider seriously investing in sound strategy, appropriate structure realignment, systems, leadership behaviours, human resource, policies, and culture.

Even though evidence suggests that there is a strong correlation between transformational leadership and teamwork, a neglect of input and processes will affect outputs negatively if there is no trust in organisations that work under pressure to realise goals.

An appreciation of emotionally intelligent resonance must be highly valued. Dissonance that comes with the stress of any work must be diffused and in its place, team spirit which is far more enduring is built, fostered and sustained. Individual personas are as a matter of course then substituted by team-think and team spirit, translating into much more room for productivity.

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